592 782 nagas or cobra-deities which were believed to guard each group were housed in the snake-grove in a corner of the garden and annually given offerings of milk and eggs by the karanavan in the presence of members. As well as warding 592 782 off ordinary sickness and misfortune they were particularly [58] believed responsible for the fertility or barrenness of taravad women. Special offerings were made to them if a woman failed to conceive, and a performance was held a at which men and women of a low caste called Pulluvar played instruments and sang songs to entice the snakes in the grove to appear. A [787] group of women of the taravad, after purifying themselves by fasting and sex-continence for several days previously, then became possessed by the snake-gods (who are said to have "entered into them") and performed a wild dance, bowing and swaying in a circle and sweeping their hair along the ground. In this condition they might speak with the voice of the snakes and announce what propitiations were necessary to appease [158] them. Sometimes the ceremony ended with one or more women falling into a fit. It seems 592 fairly certain that the snake-gods were (as so 786 commonly elsewhere) worshipped as phallic symbols. Since they were definitely not regarded as the spirits of dead matrilineal forbears, but were capable of alternately withholding fertility from taravad women or causing them to conceive, it is a plausible guess that they collectively symbolized the procreative powers of past genitors of the property-group, who had been so essential to its perpetuation yet

12:Peter E-5 (1939, 1949) 1963 AWll Kerala AWll



Thandans. With the latter, a lot of men were known for their proclivities of this sort, and they were nearly as bad as the Moplas, I was told. The latter were very much addicted to sodomy, but then it was part of their culture, and had been acquired with Islam from the Arabs.

There was no impotence or frigidity in Kerala, not with any caste, I heard. People were far from "cold" and passion, rather, was the rule. I was given a long description of the consummate art with which the higher castes indulged in amorous pleasures and assured that the lower castes had only learned from them. It seemed, however, that the Thandans could never hope to excel in these matters, especially the women who were still far from being the "angels" which those of their superiors undoubtedly were.

Asked about crime, neurosis, and insanity, my interpreters said that, to their knowledge, there was little of these in the area. As only recently, since my arrival in Shoranur, a Thandan woman had assassinated her husband, I remarked on the circumstance and asked them how they reconciled it to their statement. They replied that it was an exceptional event, and that for a long time previously, nothing of the sort had happened. People, on the whole, were docile and not aggressive. They did not even indulge in poisoning, which occurred quite frequently in other parts of the country. Again, insanity seemed to be restricted to the Moplas, who, apart from occasionally running amok as is well known, had members of their community frequently tied up in a mosque or to iron stakes, in the hope that they could thus be cured.

## D. POLYANDRY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN KERALA

Unquestionably, polyandry no longer thrives as it did in Kerala and research into what changes have brought about this situation over the last two hundred years cannot fail to be of interest. I myself, having returned to the area after an absence of ten years, was able to notice many alterations, although these were not sufficient to warrant any specific consideration. Dr A. Aiyappan, Superintendent, Government Museum, Madras, has made a particular study of the Irava community, and in his publications on this subject, and on the more special aspect of polyandry in other castes of Malabar, has shown what factors are involved and how foreign contact has undermined the old culture and is bringing a new one into existence. Readers are referred to his books and articles listed in the Bibliography. I give here a brief outline of his